

THE PORTRAIT OF THE COUNTESS OF DYSART AS JUNO

Newly arrived at The Cleveland Museum of Art is the richly elegant PORTRAIT OF THE COUNTESS OF DYSART AS JUNO, bequeathed to the Museum by John D. Rockefeller, Jr., and done by Sir Thomas Lawrence, England's most fashionable portrait painter of the late XVIII and early XIX centuries.

Lawrence represented the culmination of the great courtly English tradition of portraiture which arose from van Dyck following closely in the wake of Thomas Gainsborough and Sir Joshua Reynolds. His style was characteristically regal and embodied great elegance. He painted in an impulsive brisk manner with bold broad strokes and rich impasto.

THE PORTRAIT OF THE COUNTESS OF DYSART AS JUNO now on display at the Museum is a superlative example of Lawrence's technique. Of an unusually large size (96 11/16 in. x 61 in.) it was painted in 1794 at the beginning of Lawrence's career and was exhibited at the Royal Academy.

The softly elegant figure of Lady Dysart dominates the canvas. Her tall commanding figure on the terrace is heightened by the low, faraway horizon at the left and by a splendid background showing a large peacock at the right whose folded tail cascades ornamentally down the balustrade on which he is perched and against which the Countess leans. Monumental regality is thus achieved.

Lawrence, born in 1769, was the son of a Bristol innkeeper. He showed great precocity for sketching likenesses early in life. His successful portraitures enabled him to establish a thriving trade in Bath and to move on to London where he received benevolent help from Reynolds. Lawrence became an associate of the Royal Academy and after Reynolds' death followed the elder painter in a number of his posts. Knighted in 1815, he was present three years later at the Conference at Aix where he painted sovereigns and diplomats. Soon afterward he became President of the Royal Academy.

The most imposing group of Lawrence's portraits are to be seen in the Waterloo Gallery at Windsor Castle.

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